Alberta Heritage Foundation
for Medical Research

Overview of the Regulation of Acupuncture in Alberta

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IP 6 Information Paper May 2001

This information paper has been prepared on the basis of available information of which the Foundation is aware from public literature and expert opinion and attempts to be current to the date of publication. It has been externally reviewed. Additional information and comments relative to the information paper are welcome and should be sent to:

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research is grateful to the following persons for information and comments on the draft paper. The views expressed in the final paper are those of the Foundation:

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Dr. Steven Aung, Chief Instructor and Examiner of the Certificate Program in Medical Acupuncture, Faculty of Extension, University of Alberta, Member of the Acupuncture Committee, President of the Canadian Medical Acupuncture Society

Dr. Roman Bayrock, Vice-President of the Acupuncture-TCM Society of Alberta

Ms. Kim Bowie, President for the Acupuncture Foundation of Canada Institute

Dr. Hugh Campbell, Registrar of the Alberta Dental Association

Mr. Dennis Chu, Health Inspector for Capital Health Authority

Dr. Arminée Kazanjian, Associate Director, Centre for Health Services & Policy Research, Associate Professor, Health Care and Epidemiology, The University of British Columbia

Ms. Cindy McLean, Registrar of the Alberta Association of Occupational Therapists

Dr. Michael Nowazek, President of the Alberta Association of Naturopathic Practitioners

Mr. Mark Raedschelders, Chairperson of the Acupuncture Program at Grant MacEwan College, Member of the Acupuncture Committee, Past president of the Acupuncture-TCM Society of Alberta

Ms. June Rock, Registrar of the Alberta Association of Registered Nurses

Dr. Renae Rodgers, Registrar of the College of Chiropractors of Alberta

Ms. Susan Turner, Registrar of the College of Physical Therapists of Alberta

Dr. Bryan Ward, Assistant Registrar of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta

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INTRODUCTION

Acupuncture is one discipline from the greater tradition of Chinese medicine. Diagnosis and treatment may be based on the philosophy of classical principles which involves facilitating the movement of Qi (a substance or energy which flows through the body) or on modern principles which involve the stimulation of neurohumoral components of the body. Equipment used may include needles with or without the application of an electrical current, laser beam, moxibustion[1], or cupping[2] administered to selected locations of the body with the intent to produce a diagnostic, therapeutic, or preventative effect.

Therapeutically and philosophically this form of health care is finding its niche in our society. The demand for, as well as the number of providers of acupuncture, is ever increasing. Numerous public and private teaching programs across Canada and the United States are offering various levels of instruction in a primary entry level or post-graduate capacity.

In response to questions initiated by the Regional Health Authorities regarding the state of acupuncture in Alberta, communication was established with the regulatory bodies whose members provide acupuncture.

METHODOLOGY

An open-ended questionnaire for gathering readily available information was distributed in December 2000 to Alberta Health and Wellness and to the various colleges and associations responsible for regulating their members. Response was on a voluntary basis. Both the questionnaire and the list of those contacted are found in Appendix A. As further regulatory groups were identified, the questionnaire was also distributed to their registrar or president.

All of the regulatory bodies responded either in written form or by telephone. Clarification as necessary occurred at times by phone, at times through personal interview. This document has been reviewed by members of the various colleges and associations completing the questionnaire, Alberta Health and Wellness, members of the Acupuncture Committee, and the head of the programs identified in this document.

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[1] moxibustion refers to the application of heat to an acupuncture point using the burning of the herb mugwort (*Artemisia vulgaris*)

[2] Cupping refers to the application of suction to an acupuncture point using a small jar or cup in which a vacuum has been created

This document is current for information up to and including the 23 April 2001.

In addition, the Health Inspectors of the two largest urban health authorities were contacted to identify numbers of people who are unregulated and to clarify items included in this report.

SCOPE OF THIS PAPER

The focus of this information paper is to identify the providers of acupuncture in Alberta and identify the bodies through which they are registered and regulated. It is not intended to provide information from beyond the borders of this province, to outline in detail the remuneration practices of the acupuncture community, nor to identify the demographics of the population using acupuncture. The curriculum of the different training programs is outside of the scope of this document as are issues involving competency.

FINDINGS

In Alberta those who perform acupuncture may fall into one of three categories of certification or governance (see Appendix B) listed at random as follows:

- Those who are members of a professional college or association (physical therapists, physicians, dentists, and chiropractors) prior to their study of acupuncture and who have completed training and examinations which are recognized by their regulating body. These people are registered and governed by their respective colleges or associations.
- Those who have completed training in an acupuncture program recognized by the Acupuncture Committee (a self-governing body, consisting of six delegated members, administered by the Health Disciplines Board) and have passed a provincial exam. These practitioners are referred to as registered acupuncturists. They may have trained in an acupuncture program at a college level or may have health-related training prior to, or as part of, their study of acupuncture (eg. Traditional Chinese Medicine practitioners, physical therapists, occupational therapists, registered nurses).
- Those who have knowledge of acupuncture, perhaps from their country of origin, who provide acupuncture but are practicing without a governing body. Expertise of this group may be varied. These practitioners may need only apply for a city license and comply with the standards of Public Safety as reviewed by the Health Inspector. When the Health Professions Act is proclaimed these practitioners will no longer be able to provide needle acupuncture.

Certification for those governed by a College or Association

The certification process is similar for those who are members of a health profession prior to their study of acupuncture. These people are governed under the regulations of their respective professions, although their scope of practice may differ.

Colleges and Associations regulating their members whose practice includes acupuncture

Physical Therapists: Physical therapists may perform acupuncture having successfully completed either the Acupuncture Foundation of Canada Institute (AFCI) courses and examinations or the Certificate Program of Medical Acupuncture (CPMA) program and examination. Only when registered on the College of Physical Therapists of Alberta Acupuncture Roster may a physical therapist incorporate acupuncture into practice. There are currently 169 who have fulfilled these qualifications enabling them to perform acupuncture within their scope of practice (those conditions helped by traditional physical therapy).

A dual practice refers to activities by one individual which are governed by two different regulatory bodies. Some physical therapists have such a practice. They have passed the provincial exam and become registered acupuncturists, thereby widening the scope of their acupuncture practice and they continue as a physical therapist. The activities of acupuncture are governed under Health Disciplines Act while the traditional physical therapy techniques remain regulated by the College of Physical Therapists of Alberta. Any charting and billing for physical therapy is kept separate to that of acupuncture.

Physicians: Physicians are certified in acupuncture either through the AFCI or CPMA. Upon completion of these programs their certification is submitted to the College of Physicians and Surgeons and they are subsequently approved to practice acupuncture. A physician may use acupuncture for any condition, subject to clinical judgement, and may do so in hospital, clinic, or home-setting as deemed beneficial for the patient. There are no restrictions to the modalities of acupuncture performed (needle acupuncture, electro-acupuncture, laser acupuncture, moxibustion, cupping). Currently there are 118 physicians approved in the province.

Dentists: Dentists may provide acupuncture having completed the AFCI or CPMA courses, although there are a few who have completed studies through the United States. The Alberta Dental Association expects that its members who are trained in acupuncture will use it within the scope of practice of dentistry. No statistics regarding the number of dentists trained were available. At present there is no specific reference to the administration of acupuncture in the Dental Association of Alberta regulations.

Chiropractors: Chiropractors are accepted to practice acupuncture by the Registrar's Office of the College of Chiropractors. Elective study may be taken in acupuncture as part of chiropractic training, or as continuing education, such as the AFCI courses, thereby providing the necessary certification recognized by the College of Chiropractors. Acupuncture may be performed only as an adjunctive therapy to adjustment or manipulation of the spine or articular surfaces, but may not be used as a stand alone therapy. Forty-six chiropractors have met the requirements to complement their practice with acupuncture and have demonstrated that they carry liability insurance to cover their practice of this discipline.

Colleges and Associations regulating their members, but not practice of acupuncture

Occupational Therapists: At present the Alberta Association of Occupational Therapists of Alberta do not have a position statement on acupuncture. They are actively examining the issue of regulation at a national level. All occupational therapists in Alberta currently treating with acupuncture are registered acupuncturists and governed, in this capacity, under the Health Disciplines Act.

Registered Nurses: Acupuncture is not regulated by the Alberta Association of Registered Nurses. All registered nurses in Alberta practicing acupuncture must be registered acupuncturists and are thereby governed, in this capacity, under the Health Disciplines Act. Registered Nurses are required to have a minimum 1125 hours of nursing practice in the preceding 5 years for renewal of registration. If time spent in acupuncture is to be counted towards nursing practice hours, the nurse must demonstrate to the nursing regulatory body how acupuncture is a part of the nursing practice through application under the provision of complementary therapy.

Certification for Registered Acupuncturists

In Alberta, the term "registered acupuncturist" refers to those who have completed a training program approved by the Acupuncture Committee and have successfully completed the provincial registration exam. Many practitioners have completed studies in Asia. Grant MacEwan College in Edmonton and the Alberta College of Acupuncture and Traditional Chinese Medicine in Calgary offer the only programs in Alberta which are currently identified as a specific course of study meeting the prerequisites required to challenge the exam.

There are no restrictions as to the scope of practice for a registered acupuncturist as it relates to acupuncture. Techniques approved by the Health Disciplines Act include needle acupuncture, electro-acupuncture, cupping, moxibustion, and acupressure. Treatment may be provided only after the client has consulted with a physician or dentist regarding the presenting condition, but does not require a

referral. After six months, if no improvement occurs, referral is made to a physician or dentist.

Under the Health Professions Act an Alberta College of Acupuncture will be established to regulate the 138 practitioners currently under the Health Disciplines Act.

Unregulated acupuncture practitioners

The training process is variable and not standardized for the people providing acupuncture who are neither registered with a professional college or association nor regulated by the Health Disciplines Act. Application for a business license may initiate the referral process for the inspection of the clinic facilities by the Health Inspector of the various regions. The Inspector will also respond to complaints about health related issues. The number of these practitioners is unknown as is the type and location of their practice, although the Health Inspectors may have statistics on the number of acupuncture offices inspected.

Naturopaths: Currently Naturopaths are not regulated under provincial legislation. This will change when their regulations are approved under the Health Professions Act. Bylaws regarding the regulation of acupuncture for Naturopaths are kept, at present, by their association. Acupuncture and Traditional Chinese Medicine is a core part of the program at the four North American colleges, which train naturopaths. This is the only course of study accepted by the Alberta Association of Naturopathic Practitioners. Included in the scope of practice is the use of needle acupuncture, electro-acupuncture, acupressure, and moxibustion. There are 30 naturopaths practicing acupuncture in Alberta.

General Information

There has been no disciplinary action taken by any of the governing bodies arising from the practice of acupuncture in Alberta. The College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta was the only governing authority to identify complications of acupuncture treatment: a pneumothorax secondary to needle application to the chest.

Acupuncture is primarily performed in the clinic setting, although some physicians and physical therapists are practicing in hospitals or providing home visits.

Reimbursement

Acupuncture services are not covered under the Alberta Health Care Insurance Plan nor by any program from Alberta Health and Wellness, including the Community Rehabilitation Program. Under the Community Rehabilitation

Program, the Regional Health Authorities (RHA) decide on the rehabilitation services provided that best meet the needs of their community. Acupuncture is not billed as a discrete entity when provided in this context, but occasionally may be offered as part of the RHA-funded physical therapy treatment plan.

Under the Alberta Health Care Insurance Plan, chiropractic treatment is reimbursed. As part of balanced billing, additional fees may be incurred by the patient to supplement the cost of chiropractic treatment. The reimbursement provided by Alberta Health and Wellness does not cover the treatment of acupuncture in the case of chiropractors.

Some insurance companies reimburse for acupuncture treatment. Alberta Blue Cross, for example, may cover acupuncture as a group benefit, but it is not available in the individual policies. The fee schedule is determined by the employer and may vary from a per visit reimbursement to a maximum allotment per year. Workers' Compensation Board (WCB) covers acupuncture for injured workers whose claim has been approved by a case worker. It must be performed by those appearing on the WCB list of practitioners who have either been approved in acupuncture by their college or association or practice as a registered acupuncturist. Apart from this, acupuncture remains primarily a fee-for-service therapy.

HEALTH PROFESSIONS ACT

The field of regulation of health care in Alberta is undergoing transition over the next few years. The Health Disciplines Act and the various individual acts under which each college or association is currently governed will combine under one act; the Health Professions Act. Passed by the Alberta Legislature May 1999, this new act is expected to be proclaimed later this year. Any person who is qualified as a member of a health profession, as recognized under this legislation, must belong to a governing college in order to provide professional services to the public. Those activities which are deemed to involve risk to the public are considered restricted activities and may be performed only by authorized individuals. Generally, these activities are performed by regulated professionals whose regulations authorize their ability to participate in the restricted activity.

The application of needles below the surface of the dermis is considered a restricted activity. Those who are without a regulating body under the Health Professions Act will no longer be able to insert needles once this act is proclaimed.

WEBSITES OF INTEREST

Acupuncture Foundation of Canada Institute-
http://www.afcinstitute.com/curric.html

Certificate Program of Medical Acupuncture -
http://www.extension.ualberta.ca/acupuncture/index.html

Grant MacEwan College Acupuncture Program -
http://www.gmcc.ab.ca/Diplomas/Acupuncture.shtml

Health Professions Act – under "Alberta's Legislation", then under "Statutes of Alberta" http://www.gov.ab.ca/qp/

Complementary and Alternative Health Practices and Therapies – a Canadian Overview:

> In August of 1999 York University Centre for Health Studies in Toronto Ontario published a document which was intended feature complementary and alternative health practices and therapies. It identified issues involved with studying Complementary & Alternative Medicine (CAM), the status of CAM in relation to the Canadian health care system and selectively examine the consumers' understanding and use of CAM. http://www.yorku.ca/yhcs – under publications

APPENDIX A: QUESTIONNAIRE TO THE REGULATORY BODIES REGARDING THE PRACTICE OF ACUPUNCTURE IN ALBERTA

Questions have arisen from the Regional Health Authorities with regards to the practice of acupuncture in Alberta. The Health Technology Unit of Alberta Heritage Foundation of Medical Research, in an attempt to respond to their needs, has compiled the following questions. I am supplying this list prior to our meeting in order that you may have an opportunity to collect the necessary information at your convenience.

1. Who is registered with your organization to do acupuncture and what are the requirements for registration?
2. How many are registered to do acupuncture?
3. What is the scope of practice your members may engage in?

   How is the treatment program decided upon?
4. Which modalities of acupuncture may your members use?
5. In which locations is acupuncture being performed under your jurisdiction – hospital, clinic, patient's home?
6. What disciplinary issues have arisen from your members performing acupuncture?
7. How is reimbursement determined and who provides it?

In addition, I wonder if you could provide the documentation of the regulations set down for the practice of acupuncture under your jurisdiction.

Regulatory bodies who completed this questionnaire	**Contact numbers**
Alberta Association of Naturopathic Practitioners (President)	(403) 266-2446
Alberta Association of Occupational Therapists (Registrar)	(780) 436-8381
Alberta Association of Registered Nurses (Registrar)	(780) 451-0043
Alberta Dental Association (Registrar)	(780) 432-1012
Alberta Health and Wellness – Acupuncture Committee (Registrar)	(780) 415 0486
College of Chiropractors of Alberta (Registrar)	(780) 420-0932
College of Physical Therapists of Alberta (Registrar)	(780) 438-0338
College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta (Assistant Registrar)	(780) 423-4764

Other groups contacted for general information:

Acupuncture Committee (Chairperson)

Acupuncture Foundation of Canada Institute (President)

Acupuncture – TCM Society of Alberta (Vice-president)

Alberta Blue Cross

Alberta Health and Wellness (Health Workforce Planning)

Calgary Health Authority (Health Inspector)

Canadian Medical Acupuncture Society (President)

Capital Health Authority (Health Inspector)

Certificate Program in Medical Acupuncture (Chief Instructor and Examiner)

Grant MacEwan College

Grant MacEwan College Acupuncture Program (Chairperson)

University of Alberta – Faculty of Extension

Veterans Affairs

Workers' Compensation Board (Health Consultant

Appendix B: Overview of practitioners of acupuncture in Alberta

Profession	Prerequisite/ Training	How many registered/ approved	Scope of practice of acupuncture	Formalized regulations*	Disciplinary Actions	Who provides reimbursement
Chiropractors	Chiropractor (course of undergraduate study may include elective in acupuncture), completed AFCI or program recognized by this College (Note: One chiropractor who practices acupuncture is also a registered acupuncturist)	46	Needle acupuncture May be used in conjunction with chiropractic treatment, not stand alone therapy	Chiropractic Professions Act and Chiropractic Profession Regulations Professional policy on acupuncture	Nil	Fee for service
Dentists	Dentist plus AFCI or CPMA or program recognized by this Association (Note: One dentist who practices acupuncture is also a registered acupuncturist)	Unknown	All modalities Within dental scope of practice	Dental Profession Act of Alberta and Regulation No separate by-law referring specifically to acupuncture	Nil	Fee for service May be covered by some insurance companies
Naturopaths	Part of core program at one of the four North American Naturopathic Colleges	30	All modalities Any condition	No provincial regulations at present By-laws are kept by the Alberta Association of Naturopathic Practitioners	Nil	Fee for service May be covered by some insurance companies
Physical therapists	Physical therapist plus AFCI or CPMA (Note: Some physical therapists who practice acupuncture are also registered acupuncturists)	169	All modalities Within physical therapy scope of practice	Physical Therapy Profession Act and General Regulations Practice guidelines for acupuncture issued as a policy statement	Nil	Fee for service WCB, some insurance companies

Appendix B: Overview of practitioners of acupuncture in Alberta (cont'd)

Profession	Prerequisite/ Training	How many registered/ approved	Scope of practice of acupuncture	Formalized regulations*	Disciplinary Actions	Who provides reimbursement
Physicians	MD plus AFCI or CPMA	118	All modalities Any condition	Medical Professions Act By-laws under the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta - no separate by-law referring specifically to acupuncture - governed under these by-laws and not those of complementary practice	Nil	Fee for service May be covered by WCB, some insurance companies
Registered Acupuncturists	Program Recognized by the Acupuncture Committee such as the Grant MacEwan College Acupuncture Program or Alberta College of Acupuncture and Traditional Chinese Medicine plus Passing the provincial exam	138	All modalities Any condition	Health Disciplines Act Alberta Regulation 42/88	nil	Fee for service May be covered by WCB, some insurance companies
Unregulated practitioners	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Nil	unknown	Fee for service

*Legislation for health professionals in Alberta can be found on the Queen's Printer http://www.gov.ab.ca/qp/ found under "Alberta legislation", then "Statutes of Alberta

Current regulations for the various professions found:

Chiropractor – Chiropractic Profession Act (under "Alberta legislation") and Chiropractic Profession regulations – section 9 (under "Statutes of Alberta")

Dentist – Dental Profession Act

Physical therapist – Physical Therapy Profession Act and Policy Statement found under http://www.planet.eon.net/~cpta/acupunct.htm

Physician – Medical Profession Act (under "Alberta legislation") and By-Laws (under the "Statutes of Alberta")

Registered acupuncturist - Health Disciplines Act (Found under "Alberta legislation", then "Regulations of Alberta") and Acupuncture Regulation 42/88 – (found under "Statutes of Alberta")

Future regulations are under the Health Professions Act (found under "Alberta Legislation")